DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 400 JC 950 361

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TITLE Assessment of Campus Climate, Spring 1995.
INSTITUTION Glendale Community Coll., CA. Planning and Research Office.
PUB DATE Jul 95
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Educational Environment; Ethnic Groups; Institutional Evaluation; *Participant Satisfaction; Rating Scales; *Reputation; School Safety; School Surveys; *Student Attitudes; Student Surveys; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS Glendale Community College CA

ABSTRACT

In an effort to gauge student perceptions of campus climate, the 1995 Spring Student Survey at Glendale Community College (GCC), in California, included a section requesting student feedback on the college. The section consisted of 14 sets of paired words, such as inexpensive and expensive, and students were requested to indicate the extent that either word applied to GCC. Responses were analyzed for 2,713 students and revealed the following: (1) over 80% responded that the college was somewhat or very safe, compared to 6% who thought it was somewhat or very unsafe; (2) about 74% thought that the college was somewhat or very friendly; (3) 67% said the college was somewhat or very accepting, while 6% thought it was somewhat or very rejecting; (4) 68% indicated that GCC had a somewhat or very good reputation, compared to 9% who indicated that it had a somewhat or very bad reputation; (5) 54% thought the college was somewhat or very expensive, compared to 22% who thought the college was somewhat or very inexpensive; (6) Asian students, particularly Korean and Chinese students, gave less positive ratings for the college's reputation and perceived the college to be more expensive than other groups; (7) 76% of Hispanic students felt that the college had a good reputation, the most of any group; and (8) younger students also tended to be more critical than older students when judging the college as accepting, comfortable, friendly, and personal. (KP)

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ED 384 400

ASSESSMENT OF CAMPUS CLIMATE
SPRING 1995

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SUMMARY

Glendale College's 1995 Spring Student Survey included a section allowing students to provide feedback on their perceptions of campus climate. Campus climate had been addressed by the 1993 Spring Student Survey, but the results were difficult to interpret. It was hoped that a different approach would be more successful.

The 1995 Spring Student Survey asked questions about students' impressions of Glendale College. The results presented a consistent picture of their perceptions. In general, all student groups felt very favorably toward the college. However, some groups had consistently less positive perceptions than other groups. Three groups seem particularly worthy of attention: Asian students, younger students, and White (non-Armenian) male students.

Asian students, particularly Korean and Chinese students, gave less positive ratings for the college's reputation and perceived the college to be more expensive than did other groups. This result is consistent with satisfaction surveys: Asian students tend to be the most critical group. It suggests that more information about Asian students' experiences should be obtained to identify the specific sources of their lower satisfaction, for example through focus groups or interviews.

Younger students also tended to be more critical than older students. Students under the age of 26 gave lower ratings than older students when judging the college as accepting, comfortable, friendly, and personal. Considering that about 58% of Glendale College students are under 26, this should probably be an area of concern. Focus groups could be used to collect more specific, in-depth information about the perceptions and problems of younger students.

White (Anglo) male students were less positive than other groups about the college's reputation, and they perceived the college to be less personal and friendly than other student groups. In particular, White male students from the Glendale area were the least positive of all student groups on questions asking how comfortable, friendly, and personal the college is (to the extent that the average White male Glendale student rated the college as slightly unfriendly and slightly impersonal). White males from Glendale also gave the lowest ratings of all groups when asked if the college has a good reputation.

All three groups—Asian students, young students, and White (Anglo) male students—seem ideal to target for further research. In particular, it would be extremely helpful to find out if the observed group differences are due to actual climate issues (Is the campus less personal toward White male students?) or to cultural differences (Are Asian students more critical toward all issues they are surveyed about?). Service units should be aware of these issues so that they may determine whether differential treatment is a possible source of dissatisfaction.

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the assessment of campus climate included in the 1995 Spring Student Survey. A previous attempt was made to evaluate directly students' perceptions of the campus climate: the 1993 Spring Student Survey included a group of questions suggested in CPEC's *Resources Guide for Assessing Campus Climate*. However, these questions proved problematic. The questions were difficult for both native and non-native English speakers. Additionally, the results were difficult to interpret.

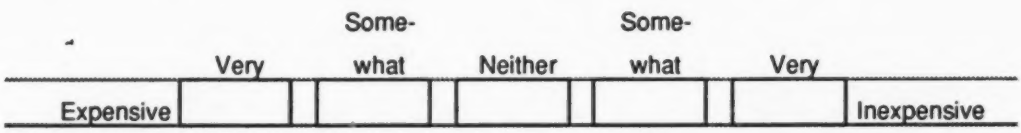
The 1993 survey questions addressed both specific and general components of campus climate. It included a series of questions on student experiences at the college. For example, one question asked "Where appropriate, have your professors incorporated materials into their classes that acknowledge the contributions of people from a variety of ethnic/cultural backgrounds?" Many students responded "Don't Know" to questions of this nature. The results of these questions were considered difficult to interpret by the Student Equity Committee and the Research & Planning Unit staff.

A separate section of the 1993 survey asked more generally how students perceived the campus. This section presented the student with pairs of opposite adjectives (for example, "comfortable" and "uncomfortable"). The student had to mark a scale indicating which adjective better described the college. This technique, called the semantic differential, is used to assess respondents' holistic perceptions rather than specific experiences.

The results of the more general section of the 1993 survey also proved difficult to interpret. The current results used the same semantic differential technique, with two major differences: more and different adjectives were used, and more detailed instructions were provided. This campus climate assessment was used as part of the 1995 Spring Student Survey, and it provided consistent information about how students view Glendale College. Although the results are not completely unambiguous, and further research is necessary to fully assess campus climate issues, the current results give a reasonably coherent picture of campus climate. They also point to three student groups—Asian students, young students, and White (Anglo) male students—whose perceptions of the college are less favorable than those of other students.

METHOD

The campus climate section of the Spring 1995 survey, called "Campus Life" on the survey, consisted of 14 items. Each item presented students with a pair of words (for example, Inexpensive/Expensive, or Bad Reputation/Good Reputation, or Traditional/Innovative). For each pair, students marked a scale indicating their perception of which word better described Glendale College. The following is an example, the Inexpensive/Expensive item:



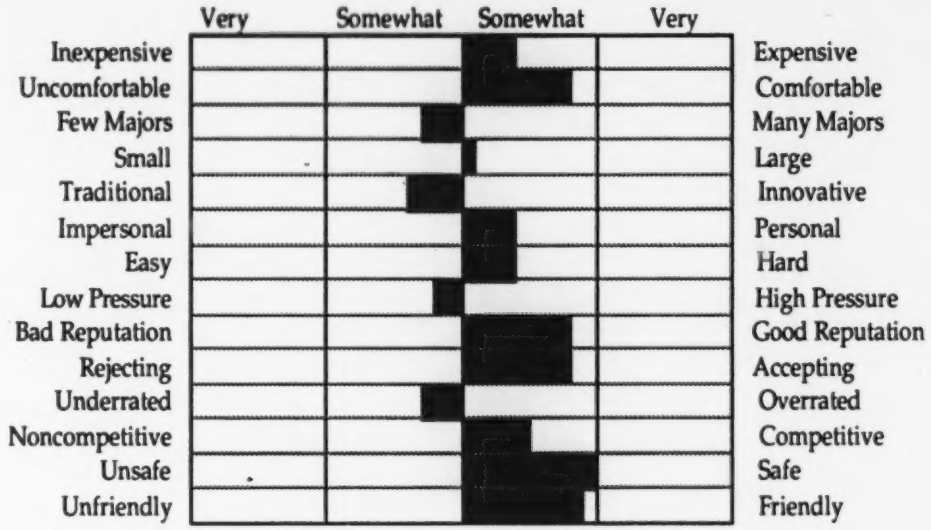
Students were instructed to mark an "X" in the box that best describes the college. There were fourteen pairs of adjectives (or indicators) for the students to mark:

Inexpensive/Expensive
Uncomfortable/Comfortable
Few Majors/Many Majors
Small/Large
Traditional/Innovative
Impersonal/Personal
Easy/Hard
Low Pressure/High Pressure
Bad Reputation/Good Reputation
Rejecting/Accepting
Underrated/Overrated
Noncompetitive/Competitive
Unsafe/Safe
Friendly/Unfriendly

RESULTS

Results for the Campus Life survey are presented below. The responses of 2,713 students were analyzed. The first graph (Figure 1) shows averages of student responses for each of the 14 indicators.

Figure 1. Mean Ratings of Campus Life Indicators



Students view Glendale College positively on almost all these indicators. The following five stand out as most positive:

- Over 80% of students say the college is somewhat or very safe; only 6% say it is somewhat or very unsafe. (Rating the college as safe is consistent across all groups, ranging from 77% for White students to 84% for Hispanic students.)
- About 74% say the college is somewhat or very friendly; only 9% say it is somewhat or very unfriendly.
- About 67% say the college is somewhat or very accepting; only 6% say it is somewhat or very rejecting.
- About 68% say the college has a somewhat or very good reputation; only 9% say it has a somewhat or very bad reputation.
- About 72% describe the college as somewhat or very comfortable; only 13% describe it as somewhat or very uncomfortable.

Additional indicators are also of interest. According to the Traditional/ Innovative measure, students perceive the college to be traditional. Almost 48% of students say the college is somewhat or very traditional, and about 15% say the college is somewhat or very innovative. This result suggests that students might not be aware of the more innovative programs at GCC.

Students also perceive the college to be expensive. About 54% say the college is somewhat or very expensive, and about 22% say the college is somewhat or very inexpensive. This is particularly true of Asian students (61% of whom say the college is expensive), but it is also true of students in the 20-24 age range (57% of whom say the college is expensive). It should be noted that students' perceptions of how expensive the college is are affected not only by actual costs but also by opportunity costs (foregone income). Opportunity costs should be considered when assessing perceived costliness.

The following sections describe the clearest group differences on the Campus Life section of the survey. These results are both statistically significant and practically meaningful. Many small differences are statistically significant due to the large number of surveys completed. However, only relatively large differences are described here: differences of greater than 0.25 points on the 4-point scale for these items.

Ethnicity Differences

Students of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds were aggregated in order to examine larger groups, allowing stronger conclusions to be drawn. Students were aggregated into five ethnic groups: Asian, Armenian, Hispanic, White, and Other.

The Asian group, with 589 students, was made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 30.1% were Filipino, 25.6% were Korean, 16.1% were Chinese, 8.1% were Vietnamese, 7.6% were Japanese, 0.7% were Laotian, 0.5% were Cambodian, and 11.2% declared their ethnicity to be "Other Asian."

The Armenian group, with 792 students, was made up of students who declared their ethnic background to be Armenian.

The Hispanic group, with 538 students, was made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 51.5% were Mexican, 17.5% were Central American, 11.3% were South American, 3.7% were Cuban, 1.1% were Brazilian, 1.1% were Caribbean/Latino, and 13.8% declared their ethnicity to be "Other Hispanic."

The White group, with 455 students, was made up of students who declared their ethnic background to be Caucasian/European. (Note that the White group does not include Armenian students.)

The Other group, with 339 students, was made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 35.9% had multiple heritages, 31.6% were Middle Eastern, 15.6% were Black, 4.7% were American Indian, 3.1% were Pacific Islanders, and 1.2% were Caribbean/Black.

Different ethnic groups have different opinions about campus life. Very generally, Armenian and Hispanic students feel most favorably toward the college. Asian students, while feeling favorably toward the college, are less positive in their ratings.

- Asian students feel *less* strongly than do other groups that the college has a good reputation. About 60% of Asian students feel the college has a good reputation, compared with 76% of Hispanic students and 72% of Armenian students. Breaking down the Asian group, Korean and Chinese students are most critical about the college's reputation; Filipino and other Asian students are less critical.
- Asian students feel more strongly than do other groups that the college is expensive. Japanese students see the college as most expensive: 71% of Japanese students feel it is expensive, compared with 61% of Asian students overall (perhaps not surprisingly, considering that the majority of the college's F-1 students are Asian).
- Asian students feel more strongly than do other groups that the college is small. Korean students feel most strongly that it is small (51% of Korean students feel the college is small, compared with 37% of Asian students overall).

- Armenian students feel most strongly that the college is friendly.
- Armenian students feel most strongly that the college is large.
- Armenian and Hispanic students feel most strongly that the college is comfortable.
- Armenian and Hispanic students feel most strongly that the college is competitive.
- Hispanic students feel most strongly that the college has a good reputation (76% of Hispanic students feel it has a good reputation, and less than 8% feel it has a bad reputation).

- White (Anglo) students feel most strongly that the college is easy.
- White (Anglo) students feel that the college is less expensive than do other students.

Age Differences

In order to examine effects of age, students were grouped into five age groups: Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-49, and Over 49. Older students appear to have a more positive view of campus life than younger students in several areas:

- The older the student, the more strongly he or she feels that the college has a good reputation.
- The older the student, the more strongly he or she feels that the college is comfortable.
- The older the student, the more strongly he or she feels that the college is friendly.
- The older the student, the more strongly he or she feels that the college is personal.
- The older the student, the more strongly he or she feels that the college is underrated.
- The older the student, the more strongly he or she feels that the college is safe.

Two other indicators—Small/Large and Accepting/Rejecting—showed different age-related trends:

- Students in the 20-24 age group feel most strongly that the college is small.
- Students in the 30-49 age group feel most strongly that the college is large.
- Students over 30 feel most strongly that the college is accepting.

Gender Differences

Males and females do not appear to perceive the college differently. Gender differences were very small for all of the campus life items. However, there were some gender differences for specific ethnic groups, as the next section describes.

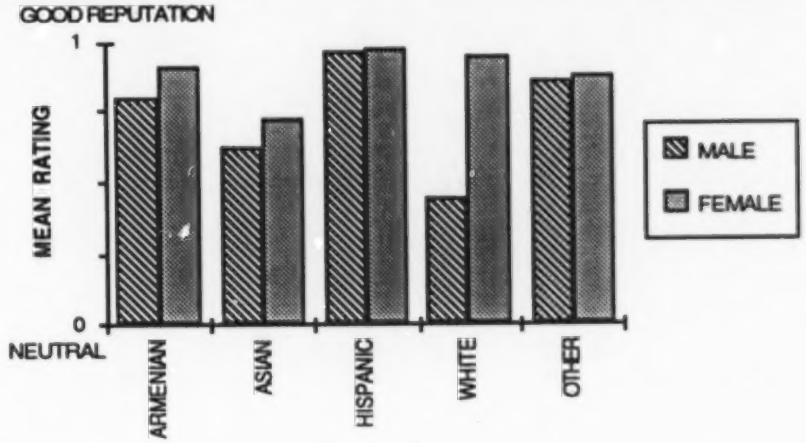
Interactions

There are several interactions in students' perceptions of campus life. In other words, some differences in perceptions are due not to the student's being a member of a certain group but to the student's having a combination of qualities. For example, the first interaction discussed below shows that a student's perception of the college's reputation depends on both ethnicity and gender. For most ethnic groups, male and female students have similar perceptions of the college's reputation. White females, however, more strongly perceive the college to have a good reputation than do white males.

"Good Reputation-Bad Reputation"-Gender/Ethnicity Interaction

For most ethnic groups, male and female students have similar opinions of the college's reputation. However, White (Anglo) females feel more strongly than White males that the college has a good reputation (see Figure 2, at the top of the next page).

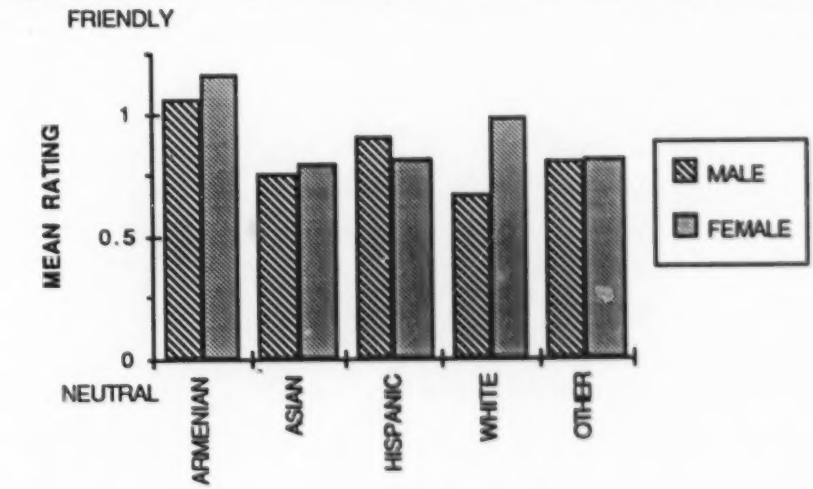
Figure 2. Gender by Ethnicity Interaction for Good Reputation Indicator



"Friendly-Unfriendly"-Gender/Ethnicity Interaction

Male students and female students find the college about equally friendly, except for White (Anglo) students. White male students find the college less friendly than do white female students (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Gender by Ethnicity Interaction for Friendly Indicator

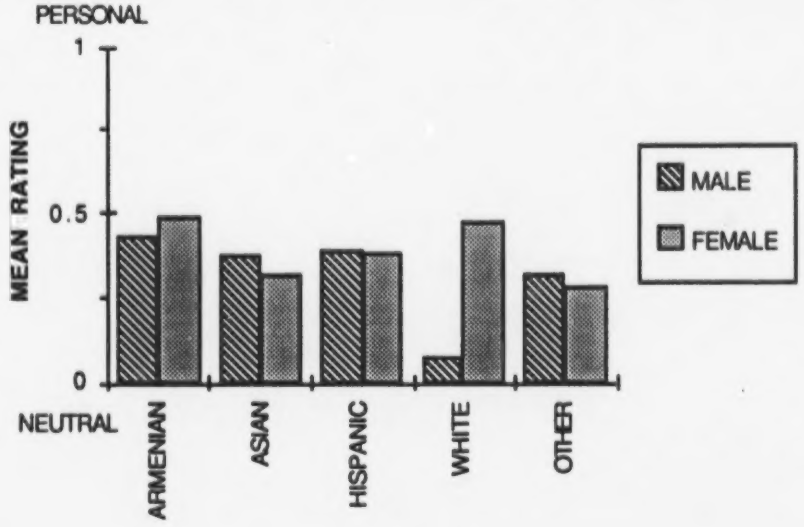


An important part of this interaction is *residence*: White (Anglo) males from Glendale, on average, rate the college slightly on the **unfriendly** side of the scale. They see the college as less friendly than any other group of students. About 22% of White male students from Glendale perceive the college as **unfriendly**, compared with only 9% of White male students from outside Glendale.

"Personal-Impersonal"-Gender/Ethnicity Interaction

Male and female students find the college about equally personal, except for White (Anglo) students. White male students give much lower ratings for the personal scale than do White female students (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Gender by Ethnicity Interaction for Personal Indicator



As with the Friendly/Unfriendly result, White male students from Glendale give the lowest ratings of all student groups for the personal measure. In fact, their average ratings are on the **impersonal** side of the scale. About 33% of White male students from Glendale feel the college is **impersonal**, compared with under 19% of White male students from outside Glendale.

Relationship of Indicators With Outcomes

The relationship between judgments of campus climate and academic performance was also investigated. An overall measure of campus climate was obtained for each student by summing their judgments of seven of the indicators: Good/Bad Reputation, Friendly/Unfriendly, Comfortable/Uncomfortable, Personal/ Impersonal, Accepting/Rejecting, Overrated/Underrated, and Safe/Unsafe. This aggregate "comfort" scale ranged from -14 (if the student gave the most negative ratings for all seven measures) to +14 (if the student gave the most positive ratings for all seven measures). Spring 1995 term GPA was used as the measure of short-term academic performance.

Correlation analysis showed a neither practically nor statistically significant relationship between the comfort measure and short-term academic performance. In other words, students with high term GPA's did not judge the college more positively than students with low term GPA's (and vice versa).

This lack of relationship between indicators and outcomes is not easy to interpret. A positive relationship (better students giving more positive judgments) might be expected. Students who do well in their classes would seem more likely to view the college as a positive environment. Additionally, students who judge the college and its programs and services positively would seem more likely to do well in their classes.

A positive relationship, however, was not found. This suggests that the indicators used in this study were measuring specific aspects of students' experiences and not simply global impressions of the college highly influenced by their in-class performances. This interpretation is supported by the indicator most highly correlated with term GPA: the Hard/Easy indicator. Students with lower term GPA's judged the college to be harder than students with higher term GPA's. The correlation was 0.1692, which is small but statistically significant.

Judgments of campus climate were also uncorrelated with term unit load: students enrolled in more units did not have consistently higher or lower judgments of the college than students enrolled in fewer units. This lack of relationship is also difficult to interpret. More research is required to better understand how different factors influence student perceptions of campus climate.

CONCLUSION

The results of the campus climate section of the survey point in a statistically reliable manner to differences in students' perceptions of Glendale College. Moreover, the results are consistent with group variations indicated by 10 years of satisfaction surveys. Students, in general, perceive the college to be comfortable, accepting, friendly, safe, and to have a good reputation. However, some groups—Asian students, younger students, and White (Anglo) male students—have consistently less positive perceptions of the college in some areas.

The survey could not identify the source of these differences in perceptions. The results of the survey could point to real campus climate differences for different groups. On the other hand, the results could be due to cultural differences among the student groups: Asian students, for example, might tend to be more critical than others for cultural reasons and not because they are treated differently from other student groups. Additionally, the comparatively negative perceptions of White male students from Glendale suggest that the college could investigate the phenomenon of the "angry White male." More in-depth research is necessary to collect information about these two possible explanations.